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HIGH-SCHOOL LATIN AND SOME MODERN CONDITIONS

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The writer of this paper has in recent years read many articles dealing with the teaching of high-school Latin and discussing methods employed to secure more accurate scholarship, which impressed him favorably as to the desirability of the ends sought and the means used to attain them.

As he read them, however, the query often arose in his mind as to where such ideal conditions existed in regard to numbers in classes, rooms available, approval of those in authority and of the general public, and previous preparation of students, as would make the working out of the scheme proposed feasible.

The fact is that, in our large cities at least, overcrowding, lack of proper school-housing and facilities, popular demand for so-called practical subjects, and increase in the proportion of foreign-born pupils have surrounded the high-school Latin teacher with so many problems of general educational import, that it requires on his part a very clear comprehension of pedagogical procedure to solve them. In other words he must add to a thorough grounding in the essentials of classical learning—involving of course acquaintance with Greek and development of the philological instinct—a familiarity with the principles and practice of the art of teaching.

In this day and generation the teacher of high-school Latin cannot be content with merely exuding classical culture, with passing on in a perfunctory way what he has gained at college. He must also be a student of educational problems, interested in young learners with all their crudeness and imperfections, and prepared to help them because he understands them. To do this does not involve his accepting all the vagaries of the educational psychologist or talking the patter of those who often conceal real poverty of thought by apparent richness of language.

But he does need to know through reading and investigation what innovations in educational theory and practice have come in

recent years, what is meant, for example, by such things as supervised study and the socialized recitation, what changes in his problems and responsibilities have been occasioned by the shifting of school population, by the democratizing of education and the introduction of vocational subjects. To stand aloof from all these things, to assume an attitude of lofty contempt at the whole procedure, to pose as the sole guardian of culture and to look askance at the modern attempt to adapt educational method to present day needs will accomplish nothing. It is only by striving to understand the problems that are before him and to solve them with the aid of every resource at his command that the Latin teacher can hope either to meet his responsibilities or to justify his faith in the value of classical training.

It is in the evident need of developing some of these considerations, and indicating some of the difficulties, that the writer finds his justification for venturing upon a pedagogical discussion.

The introduction of the junior high school in order to avoid the break between the eighth and ninth years and to save for the ninth year and beyond many pupils who would otherwise have been eliminated, not only creates many new problems of administration connected with courses of study and division of time, but also puts teachers of elective studies like Latin face to face with difficulties hard to meet. The increase of senior high school enrolment due to the existence of the junior high schools and to the stricter enforcement of compulsory-education laws has, except in those few places where proper forethought has wisely anticipated growing building-needs, brought exigencies of school-housing into sharp conflict with the reasonable demands of the teachers for conditions favorable to efficient classroom work. One consequence of this situation has been the adoption in many places of shift-plans which crowd out consultation periods and make it well-nigh impossible for teachers to give backward students the benefit of later individual attention. Crowded conditions also bring about grouping for class purposes by thirties and thirty-fives—and even forties—instead of by twenties and twenty-fives, making mass-formation tactics imperative. Inadequate building facilities again may make necessary the combination of the smaller elective units

in Latin in the Senior and Junior years into groups not sufficiently homogeneous, in the interest of economy of space. All of these things conspire to make the work of the Latin teacher more difficult and unsatisfactory.

In one particular the enrichment of the junior high school course by the addition of vocational subjects, while it cuts down the time available for home-study on language electives, operates to the advantage of Latin, through making it possible to avoid forcing into Latin those not equipped to pursue that subject.

Given freedom of choice and a large range of electives, the recognition by many parents of the unfitness of their children to pursue the study of Latin would deter not a few. Public opinion at the same time would discountenance such action as that taken by one over-zealous classicist, filling a principal's position, who used to distribute his entering class among the courses offered by making the following announcements: "Those who have decided to take the Latin course will pass over to the right" (the better-dressed and better-appearing third of the class at once rush in that direction). "Those whose parents wish them to take the industrial course will pass over to the left" (a more poorly dressed and rather shamefaced detachment starts to the left side of the room). "Now the rest of you may choose."

Inasmuch as conditions on the whole appear to be less favorable to the pursuit of courses in Latin, what are some of the general conclusions which we must reach as to ways and means of procedure? One very apparent conclusion is that, since the increment in high-school population is for the most part not headed for college, the colleges must less and less dominate the work in high-school Latin either as to content or as to method. Too long have high-school courses been planned to meet the requirements of the relatively small group which aimed at college entrance, thereby neglecting the needs of the great majority who must stop at high-school graduation, or, perhaps, before. For those whose goal is college the aim is naturally the acquisition of sufficient ability to read Latin to satisfy entrance requirements and to succeed in Freshman courses. For the others this aim is certainly not the sole one nor necessarily the chief one. To discover the place of the

Romans in history, to measure their contribution, direct and indirect, to modern civilization, to trace out concretely the connection of our own language with the Latin, to extend one's cultural horizon and to develop imagination and appreciation by the study of Latin masterpieces as literature—these are worthy and practical ends for the average student. Much more worthy and practical ends they are in fact than the building of the foundation for the work of the specialist and investigator by over-devotion to laborious and minute study of syntax and to translation exercises. To take this point of view would not involve encouraging superficially or minimizing the disciplinary value of hard digging, but would simply shift the emphasis enough to get the right perspective.

Rightly have the colleges in recent years based their decision as to a student's fitness for college entrance in Latin upon his acquisition of power as shown by his ability in sight-reading rather than upon his meeting of some iron-clad requirement as to authors read. An important advantage resulting has been the gaining of time for the incidental study of the public and private life of the Romans, their art and their literature, and their manifold contributions to later civilizations.

These considerations lead naturally to the changes in method made necessary by changing conditions. How many college and high-school recitations we can all recall which were simply examples of lesson-hearing! In these dreary affairs the teacher's contribution to the elucidation of the lesson took the form of monotonous instructions as to who was to begin reciting and who was to continue, punctuated at intervals by some caustic comment or sarcastic rejoinder, if the unfortunates called upon did not perform as anticipated. There was no résumé or review of the material of the previous lesson, no illumination of the present lesson's intricacies by deft exposition or telling illustration, no summing up of the salient points the better to retain them in the mind, no connecting up of its content with anything related to one's everyday experiences, no lightening of the difficulties of the morrow by skilful preliminary questions. All of this of course has had to change. One of the great contributions that modern study of educational methods has made to the solution of the problems of

classroom procedure is the attempt to substitute, in Latin as well as in other subjects, the spirit of co-operation for the old out-worn method of lesson-hearing.

The socialized recitation may, to be sure, run this idea into the ground by over-organization, which forces the teacher into the rôle of mere ringmaster and deprives the class of the benefits of his richer experience and ripper culture. But after all there is no surer way of reaching the goal of acquaintance with the Latin language, and through it with Roman thought and life, than by the enlistment of the enthusiastic interest of each individual in the class through active participation in the exercises planned for the recitation period. Let us examine the usual methods of approach in the solution of classroom problems to test the correctness of this theory.

When a Latin teacher is brought in contact with that familiar type of boy to whom the content of a Latin course does not make an immediate appeal, resort is usually had, according to the temperament of the teacher and the traditions of the school, either to "hard" or "soft" pedagogy (as it has been styled). In other words, either attention to the subject is compelled by threats of unpleasant consequences to follow failure to give such attention, or factitious interest is aroused by clothing the subject in agreeable garb and emphasizing only its pleasant features. It must be clear that neither of these devices solves the problem. The former method, coming down from the time when knuckles were rapped for false Latin quantities, secures interest only during the time of its employment, and often defeats its own end by surrounding the subject with a bad entourage of associations, which facilitate the forgetting process when the pressure is removed. The latter method, all too much resorted to in modern times, not only attracts attention away from the really vital matters to be mastered to traits often adventitious and unessential, but, by its neglect to add bone-building material in proper quantity, results in mental flabbiness and inactivity. It will be generally agreed that the old-time Latin teacher's tendency was to make too small a contribution to the activities of the class. The regulation assignment in first-year Latin, for example, consisted of a new declension or

conjugation to be learned, along with the memorizing of all the coarse print in some standard grammar dealing with a rather large group of mood or case constructions. This type of assignment, without the giving of any illustrative matter or the blazing of the paths through the difficulties, naturally resulted in a needless scrapping of human material intrusted to his charge. It is equally true that the modern Latin teacher's temptation, when faced by his none too ambitious or well-equipped group, is to do too much for his class. Too many of these teachers emulate the example of that young entomologist who assisted a struggling butterfly out of its chrysalis and thus made useless those magnificent wings which only this very struggle could render serviceable.

Avoiding the extremes of both the "driving" and the "sugar-coating" methods, the skilful Latin teacher will attempt to create a proper spirit of co-operation by attaching the activities inherent in the subject to the interests already aroused in the pupil's mind, by stimulating intellectual energy, by appealing to the natural tendency to observe and question, with the resulting satisfaction that comes from the solving of problems. In first-year Latin any device may be used which will keep active the whole class, such as the organizing of separate rival groups which shall keep tab on each other's errors and tabulate each week or each month the comparative scores. Of use also are perception cards for the learning of vocabularies or declensional endings, and even the playing of language games to enliven the interest—in fact anything which will keep the students on the *qui vive* and eager to participate in the classroom exercises. After regular translation work begins in the second year one might suggest the investigation (followed by a report) by individuals or committees of questions connected with the subject-matter, a bit of archaeology or geography or history bearing on the text, a comparison of Ariovistus' perfidy with that of a modern Hun, or a study of Roman politics as portrayed by Cicero with reference to the light it throws on graft or socialism or bolshevism today. Quite fruitful of results is a study of the difference in the treatment of the same case or mood-construction by different editors, with the object of developing in the student the power to investigate and

observe and form independent judgments himself. The very difference in demeanor between students entering Latin rooms in which the atmosphere is the one described above and those entering the "leave-hope-behind-who-enter-here" type of room is significant. The manner of the former class is that of those who know they are about to do a definite and interesting bit of work, whose accomplishment will give them pleasure. The latter group go unwillingly, merely in obedience to the signal, with no spring in their gait or luster in their eye. How apparent it is then that interest is the key to the whole situation, and that when it is properly aroused all difficulties seem small and all obstacles surmountable!